Chairman's Message

CCP13 has had a year of very mixed fortunes. It was extremely difficult to see the departure of Richard Denny and of Mark Shotton from the project, who have taken programming positions in industry. Both were graduates from the Keele fibre diffraction group. Richard was the first CCP13 RA and held the post for more than 6 years. Following his appointment to a position at Daresbury he remained a key influence both as a member of the Steering Committee and in the supervision of CCP13 activities at Daresbury. He will be remembered for the mathematical rigour that he built into CCP13 software and for his patience while helping a large number of users with software and data analysis. Mark Shotton, although involved for a much shorter period of time, also played a key role in the project. His attention to detail and sheer persistence in the face of difficult problems was extremely valuable for software development and for the user community. The expertise of both Richard and Mark will be badly missed in the academic sector and their recruitment into the private one reminds us of one of the major difficulties faced by all of the CCP projects: the fact that good scientific programmers are highly valued in industry. It is clear that individual CCPs and indeed funding agencies will need to bear this in mind if we are not to go through repeated cycles in which hard-earned years of experience in scientific research is lost to a vibrant commercial sector that pays well and offers better job security.

On the positive side we are extremely pleased to welcome Matthew Rodman as the new CCP13 postdoc, replacing Mark Shotton. Matthew is a physicist by training and has extensive expertise in procedural and object oriented programming. It is not easy at the best of times starting a new job, let alone starting one in which six months of programming, documentation and administrative tasks have accumulated. However, he has put himself to the task with enthusiasm and vigour and I am sure that we will all do everything we can to make this transition period pass as smoothly as possible.

Another major boost for CCP13 has been the excellent outcome of the latest grant renewal application. The application was submitted to the BBSRC Biomolecular Science Committee and was funded both by BBSRC and EPSRC. It will provide us with 3.5 postdoctoral posts to run along side half a post from the Non Crystalline Diffraction (NCD) group at Daresbury Laboratory. This amounts to a quadrupling of the manpower effort available.

This large enhancement of CCP13 funding could not have come at a better time. In addition to the seemingly relentless increase in computing power that we see from year to year, there are now massive changes on the horizon for the exploitation of a new high performance network (GRID) that promises vastly enhanced data access and transparency that will revolutionise the way we look at data management, data analysis and modelling. Now more than ever we need to recognise that programming initiatives such as CCP13 need to remain flexible and dynamic so that we can look to computational methods that were quite simply out of the question even just a few years ago. We also need to take a lead on establishing clear standards for the data that we use and produce. Such approaches will in the end have an enormous effect on the quality and throughput of our work.

Finally, I hope that you are all able to come to the CCP13/NCD workshop at Stirling University (13th-15th June). We have an excellent programme lined up and hope that the meeting will be as successful and as well attended as the previous meetings at St. Andrews and Sheffield Universities. Remember also that Fibre Diffraction Review, as well as containing invited papers presented at the annual workshop, is also open to submitted papers. All are thoroughly refereed and the distribution to colleagues within the field is highly effective. Please consider publishing your work here!

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May 2001